

Takamore to return to Christchurch

SEVEN years after the body of James Takamore was snatched from a funeral parlour, it finally looks set to return home.

An agreement was reached this week after his family agreed to allow the Kutarere Marae committee to carry out a disinterment, with a final hui scheduled for July 1 to discuss the process, Fairfax News reported.

Mr Takamore, a father of two, died of an aneurism in 2007 and was about to be buried in Christchurch, where he had lived with partner Denise Clarke and their two children for nearly 20 years.

His Tuhoe relatives had other plans, however, and spirited his body away to his birthplace in the Eastern Bay, where they buried him next to his father at Kutarere Marae, near Opotiki.

Ms Clarke, who is the executor of Mr Takamore's estate, obtained a High Court judgment confirming her right to decide his burial place and ordering an exhumation.

The decision was upheld in the Court of Appeal, but Mr Takamore's sister, Josephine Takamore, lodged an appeal in the Supreme Court on the grounds that Tuhoe tikanga, or customary protocol, should decide the location of burial.



James Takamore,
family man



Denise Clarke,
widow

After years of legal wrangling, the Supreme Court dismissed the appeal in December 2012, and upheld the exhumation order.

Ms Clarke said she knew Mr Takamore's body would eventually be returned, but had become so used to waiting that she did not expect it to happen this soon.

It had been agreed that the disinterment would happen by August, and that the body would be returned to Christchurch for reburial on August 17, the seventh anniversary of his death.

"He gets to be laid to rest where he wanted to be. Near his children is what he would have wanted. We can go to see him, me, his children and his grandchildren, and have a proper burial for him, which we haven't been able to do for seven years."

Ms Clarke said she had not spoken to the Takamore family directly during the process and was unsure if she would be in contact with them again.

"I know they were dragging it on as long as they could . . . they were just trying to exhaust every avenue.

"I don't know [if I'll speak to them], I really don't know. I don't know if I want to, if you know what I mean."

Ms Clarke's lawyer, Gary Knight, said it had been a frustrating period since the Supreme Court decision, but the Takamore family had finally decided that, although they could not be involved in the disinterment, it could go ahead.

"In the end, they couldn't bring themselves to do it, it wasn't a step they were willing to take."

He admitted that the lack of communication had been frustrating, but forcing the matter was a last resort. "Could we have enforced an early disinterment? Yes, we could have. We chose not to, so much time has already passed, it seemed pointless forcing it."

Neither the Takamore family, their lawyer, nor marae committee chairman Barry Kiwara could be contacted yesterday.